



## **Hartford Foundation for Public Giving Testimony in Support of**

### **House Bill 5299, An Act Increasing the Age for Eligibility for the Postsecondary Education Funding Program Offered by the Department of Children and Families**

#### **Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

**March 8, 2022**

Good afternoon, Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, Senator Witkos, Representative Haines and distinguished members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of House Bill 5299, An Act Increasing the Age for Eligibility for the Postsecondary Education Funding Program Offered by the Department of Children and Families.**

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** As a community foundation, we manage approximately \$1 billion in assets. In the past two years, the Foundation has distributed a record-breaking \$97 million in grants to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region. Made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations, the Foundation has awarded grants of more than \$894 million since its founding in 1925.

In Greater Hartford, there are a number of good paying jobs available, but there is misalignment between the skillsets required and the skills of the current workforce. The Foundation's efforts focus on preparation, hiring and retention of residents with significant barriers to employment, including returning citizens and youth disconnected from school and work.

For example, among students from Greater Hartford's Alliance Districts where participation rates in postsecondary training are comparatively low, our efforts aim to increase career exposure and post-secondary degree and credential completion, leading to better employment opportunities. This work includes 2Gen approaches that take a family-centered approach that considers childcare and supports for both the parents and children to allow them to focus on training.

Recognizing the value of this postsecondary training to the economic mobility of low income students, in 2020, the Foundation awarded five grants to four colleges (Asnuntuck Community College, Capital Community College, Goodwin University, Manchester Community College) and one nonprofit organization (Hartford Promise), totaling \$234,788 to reach students who have worked hard to advance their studies but struggle to overcome the additional challenges that arose during the pandemic. All five initiatives leveraged a combination of wraparound supports including: increased access to technology or related supports for remote learning; academic and social integration, peer mentoring or coaching; microgrants to address basic human needs or enable access to books or academic materials; and stipends for students to replace lost income. Hartford Promise's Urgent Needs for Promise Scholars program established a pool of emergency funds for scholars enrolled in Manchester and Capital community colleges. For many, these funds allowed them to continue their studies without needing to take on extra jobs to support themselves and their families.



The challenges facing opportunity youth, individuals aged 16 – 24 who are currently disengaged from school or work including children and youth transitioning from DCF care, can be particularly daunting. To begin to address these challenges, in August 2021, the Foundation partnered with the City of Hartford and Dalio Education to invest a total of \$9.6 million to support opportunity youth. This work is being led by [COMPASS Youth Collaborative](#), [Our Piece of the Pie \(OPP\)](#) and [Roca, Inc.](#), which are providing individualized, trauma-informed, high-touch support to, in part, help them connect with training and other services leading to life-sustaining wage jobs and viable careers.

With a high percentage of older and first-generation students and the most diverse student body in Connecticut, [Capital Community College](#) plays a central role serving youth transitioning from DCF care in Greater Hartford. In December 2021, to support CCC in better serving its student body, the Foundation provided a grant to for its on-campus **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Center Initiative** designed to help connect students to both internal and external support programs needed to persist and complete their studies and move on to gainful employment.

As highlighted in Connecticut Voices for Children's February 2022 report, [Rising Out of Recession: How Connecticut can Support Young Adults Transitioning Out of the Child Welfare System in Challenging Economic Times](#), only 45 percent of all college students graduate within four years. The numbers are even more stark for Black and Latino students where only 25 percent of Black students and 35 percent of Latino students graduate in four years.

**House Bill 5299 is a positive step to increasing the stability and security of young people who have been in DCF care. It helps to ensure that youth can lead more stable, independent, and fruitful lives. Connecticut's young adults leaving DCF care do not have the benefit of family wealth and support and must balance working to pay for education, housing and other needs with their schoolwork. With the cost of college continuing to rise, young adults leaving DCF care working towards a postsecondary degree to further their career aspirations need the additional support beyond the age of 23 that this bill would provide.**

The Foundation looks forward to continuing its work with policymakers, nonprofits, and residents to develop effective long-term policies that ensure all Connecticut residents have access to quality, affordable housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods and all residents have the resources they need to obtain the education and training they need to support themselves and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfpg.org](mailto:policy@hfpg.org) or 860-548-1888.